

**OPEN MIN.D. vs. SPECIALIZED AETHOS**  
**LIGHT, FAST: THE ULTIMATE PLUSH RIDES**

# ROAD BIKE

## ACTION MAGAZINE

MARCH 2021  
roadbikeaction.com



Specialized

Open

**TITANIUM  
GRAVEL  
BIKE SHOOTOUT**  
SAGE STORM KING  
vs. MASI INCANTO



**HOW I WON  
THE TOUR  
DE FRANCE  
WINNER  
TELLS ALL!**

**EDITORS' CHOICE:**   
**THE BEST BIKES, RIDERS & ACCESSORIES**



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**Y**ear after year we hear the claim from so many bike manufacturers that they've designed the lightest, stiffest and fastest frame ever. While this phenomenon is nothing new (or specific to the bike market), it has certainly become increasingly common in the age of carbon fiber. This repetition of marketing hype is all the reason consumers need to wonder aloud, "What's the point of getting the latest and greatest black plastic bike when

there will no doubt be a better version to come the following year?"

It's in this market environment where titanium bikes have been able to prosper, especially when it comes to gravel bikes. Titanium has long been a boutique material in the cycling industry, thanks to its weight-to-stiffness ratio. Specifically, the 3 aluminum/2.5 vanadium titanium alloy provides the most easy-to-work yet high-performance blend of the material. The

stiffness characteristics are better than aluminum and carbon while being less dense than steel for an ideal balance of durability, weight and performance.

And that's where both Sage and Masi enter the arena for 2021. With the recent release of their Storm King and Incanto gravel bikes, both brands have committed to future relevance in not so "heavy metal."

Of course, for Sage, the mission is clear, as it is a titanium-specific brand

that has been pumping out a wide variety of American-made road, gravel and mountain bikes since 2012.

Although some may recognize the Masi name owing to its legacy as a storied Italian brand, the modern make has nothing to do with the bikes that originated in the famed workshop located underneath the Vigorelli velodrome in Milan.

## THE FRAMES

### Sage

Constructed with 3/2.5 round tubes, the Storm King is Sage's "monster gravel" bike, owing to its abundant level of tire clearance that has room for up to 700x50 or 650x2.4 tires. Further optimized to survive the extremities of gravel riding is our 54cm Storm King's 102.5cm wheelbase paired with a well-balanced, 72-degree head tube angle. Straight 42.5cm, symmetric chainstays

give the Storm King a hint of classic Ti design, while a 58cm stack height and 38.7cm reach promote a more upright position ideal for long rides.

A slightly bowed seat tube draws attention just below the "Made in the USA" sticker to the T-47 bottom bracket. The threaded BB is a nice touch to prevent creaks when the bike gets dirty. Notably, the seat tube is missing a braze-on which means a clamp-on derailleur is necessary.





and shapely 3/2.5 tubes sourced in Asia. The overall build quality, best evidenced by the welds, and unique details like the chainstay yoke, were impressive. As the brand's first titanium gravel offering (they also offer a trio of lower-priced aluminum bikes), the Incanto is a well-rounded effort with a max tire clearance of 700x45mm or 650x2.1. The Incanto's wheelbase measures a bit longer than the Sage's at 102.75cm, but the head tube angle is a much slacker 70.5 degrees. Although the head tube angle isn't obvious at first glance, the effects were noticeable throughout our testing. A reach of 38cm is matched to a stack of 58cm.

The seat tube and the head tube are the only round tubes on the Incanto. Masi used an ovalized downtube with internal cable routing that gives the Masi a clean look that highlights the titanium's brushed finish and subtle branding.

***“From steep fire roads to rollers and freshly graded roads to rock gardens, the Sage’s Shimano GRX 1x drivetrain got the job done. The mechanical shifting required the slightest touch and crisply moved to the selected gear.”***

Masi purposely used an asymmetric, dropped-yolk chainstay design to provide clearance for gravel tires while maintaining responsiveness. But, at 42.5cm, they're the same length as the Storm King's straight stays and allow less clearance. Thin, ovalized seatstays meet just below the top tube for a torsionally stiff yet forgiving rear end. Like the Sage, the Incanto has a seatstay bridge drilled for a fender. Both bikes have mounts for three water bottles, as well as a top tube bag.

## THE PARTS

### Sage

Sage offers an a-la-carte take on bike building, which means there are no base builds. Instead, Sage's website walks potential buyers through a part-by-part build process for ultimate customization. Although the options aren't all-encompassing, the

gravel drivetrains from the “Big Three” component makers—Shimano, SRAM and Campagnolo—are available.

Our test bike was equipped with Shimano's GRX kit with a 40t chainring paired to an 11-40 cassette. The 1:1 gear ratio is the maximum low gear we recommend for gravel riding. We would have preferred the 11-42 cassette for this build, as the 40t GRX chainring is the smallest 1x option Shimano offers. Our bike used a 140/160mm rotor combo, but Sage offers customers a selection of matching sizes.

Continuing Sage's “made in the USA” aesthetic includes an assortment of parts from the Utah-based carbon company Enve. The 42cm handlebar flares out to 54cm in the drops; yes, it's nearly the length of the entire seat tube. An Enve stem, seatpost and G-Series fork round out the carbon bits. Sage spec'd their own Beccus saddle to finish the build.

Sage's Oregon neighbor Rolf Prima supplies the Astral Wanderlust carbon wheels. We measured a 22mm internal rim width, and they are mounted with tubeless-ready 36mm IRC Boken tires. Sage offers two options for headset bearings, and our Storm King got the top-end, American-made Chris King treatment.

### Masi

Masi surprised us by not only offering the Incanto with a 1x Shimano GRX build, but also the new 13-speed Campagnolo Ekar components that our test bike rode with. Typical of the Italian way, which has traditionally stood apart from Shimano and SRAM, the Ekar single-sided shifting duties are handled on the right-hand lever. Both aluminum brake levers maintain Campy's double-curve design.

It hasn't taken us long to grow fond of Campy's entry into the world of gravel. The 13-speed cluster (9-42t) leaves much to be desired from the 11-speed and 12-speed offerings from Shimano and SRAM. As with the Sage, we would have preferred either the 38t or even 36t chainrings Campy offered versus the 40t that was spec'd.

Unique to the Campy spec are the Fulcrum Rapid Red wheels, which measure a 24mm internal rim width. What makes them special is that they are one of the handful of production wheels that are compatible with the Ekar hub spacing.

Masi uses an in-house carbon fork and handlebar paired to an alloy stem. The 34.9mm titanium seatpost topped with a Selle Italia SLR Boost saddle is a nice touch. Kenda's 40mm tubeless-

ready Alluvium Pro tires were easy to set up with the provided valves. The wheels rely on Campagnolo's superb disc brakes to slow things down.

## THE RIDE

### Sage

It was clear from the first ride that the Storm King is a refined gravel bike. The 36mm Boken tires ballooned out to nearly 40mm on the Astral rims. At 35 psi, the tires significantly muted the bumps and road imperfections. There was added compliance up front, owing to the Enve carbon fork, and in the rear from the shapely seatstays.

The oversized head tube pairs well with its 72-degree angle and provides quick handling, which made handling tight switchbacks and twisty fire roads full of hikers all the more navigable. Thanks to the long 102.5cm wheelbase, the Storm King felt stable on descents at speed.

From steep fire roads to rollers and freshly graded roads to rock gardens, Shimano's GRX 1x drivetrain got the job done. The mechanical shifting required the slightest touch and crisply moved to the selected gear. While the 1:1 gear ratio got us up all the climbs, again, we would prefer an easier low gear to lessen the strain on our legs. Compared to the 13-speed Campagnolo drivetrain, the jumps between the easiest gears are noticeable, and maintaining cadence required a few more back-and-forth shifts.

### Masi

Masi's move into the titanium market will likely be led by the Incanto. The slack head tube makes for predictably slow and stable handling characteristics, which would be ideal for bikepacking and long adventure riding. The 40mm Kenda Alluvium Pros measured up to nearly 45mm when inflated, and they eagerly ate up bumps when we ran them at 32 psi. The relatively relaxed geometry is geared for a more comfortable, upright riding position.

What really made the Masi stand out was the Campagnolo Ekar 13-speed drivetrain (for a full introduction of the 13-speed effort, read our January 2021 issue). Campy's signature “clunk” shift separates each gear shift made. With its 9t small cog and 40t chainring, the Masi excels on the downhills and flats, but we would have preferred a smaller chainring to properly take advantage of the range the cassette offers.

While being able to pedal up to 35 mph on the descents is appreciated, the 40x9 gear is not useful for most of the steep gravel roads that make up our

daily test routes. A smaller chainring would pair better with the 9t cog and further expand the climbing goals of the 42t easy gear. One niggling problem we came across was that the downshift lever would occasionally get caught on the brake lever. This prevents the thumb shifter from changing gears until the shift lever was returned to its proper resting position.

***“With its 9t small cog and 40t chainring, the Masi excels on the downhills and flats, but we would have preferred a smaller chainring to properly take advantage of the range the cassette offers.”***

## THE VERDICT

Both bikes made the most of the characteristics of titanium. It's an optimal frame material for the rigors of gravel riding. The fact that a titanium frame stands a much better chance of surviving a crash than carbon, and aluminum makes any frame material a solid choice as a gravel grinder.

Sage's selection of customizable parts makes building a premium lifelong gravel bike as easy as signing up for the first gravel race you'll be taking it to. Masi offers a well-rounded frame with premium components that can plow through the chunkiest of gravel at a price point more can afford.

The road-bike-like handling of the Storm King and higher build quality made it the preference of our test riders, but for those in the Ti bike market, the price of the Incanto frame makes it a reasonable canvas for a custom build. ■

## SAGE PUNCH LINES

- Next-level customization
- Made in the USA
- Massive tire clearance

## MASI PUNCH LINES

- Get your money's worth
- Slack geometry
- A smaller chainring would help



The wide range and tight jumps of the Ekar cluster is the highlight of the Incanto build.

## SAGE STATS

**Price:** \$8989, \$4560 (frameset)  
**Weight:** 19.60 pounds  
**Sizes:** 50, 52, 54 (tested), 56, 58, 60, 62cm  
[www.sagetitanium.com](http://www.sagetitanium.com)

## MASI STATS

**Price:** \$6000, \$3600 (frameset)  
**Weight:** 20 pounds  
**Sizes:** 47, 51, 54 (tested), 56, 58, 60cm,  
[www.harobikes.com](http://www.harobikes.com)



Masi's shapely proprietary carbon fork gives the Incanto's slack front end an eye-catching flair.

Very few upgrades are desired thanks to the top-of-the-line Enve and Chris King components spec.

Sage's oversized 44mm head tube is a pull from their mountain bike designs. It's preferred for the added front-end stiffness and responsiveness the extra width provides. And last, the most striking tubing on the Storm King are the curvy seatstays. An old-school seatstay bridge is included and is drilled with a fender mount.

### Masi

Masi built the Incanto with butted



Titanium craftsmanship is put on display by the Storm King's shapely seatstays. They allow clearance for up to 700x50 tires.





**THE GEAR**

Helmet: Specialized  
Jersey: Bontrager  
Bib: De Marchi  
Shoes: Sidi  
Socks: Giant  
Glasses: Shimano



**THE GEAR**

Helmet: Bell  
Jersey: Specialized  
Bib: Pedal Mafia  
Shoes: Shimano  
Socks: Team Dream Team  
Glasses: Oakley